The Rise of the Staircase

Schmidt, Freek

published in
Early Modern Spaces in Motion
2021

document version
Peer reviewed version

The Rise of the Staircase: Motion in Eighteenth-Century Dutch Domestic Architecture

Freek Schmidt

Originally published in *Early Modern Spaces in Motion: Design, Experience and Rhetoric*. Edited by Kimberley Skelton. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020. 139-163.
https://www.aup.nl/en/book/9789463725811/early-modern-spaces-in-motion

Abstract: In the eighteenth-century homes of the Dutch elite, the indispensable but inconspicuous device of the stairs developed into a monumental, designed centrepiece of the house. This contribution considers the new open-well staircase in the broader context of the growing demand for social space, a recurring interest in French (court) culture and fashion, and a specific interest among the Dutch elite in graceful movement of the civilized human body. A closer study of architectural model books, etiquette manuals, and reflections on cultured behavior, style, elegance, and physical movement helps to explain the rise of this space-consuming element in eighteenth-century house in the Netherlands and Amsterdam in particular.

Keywords: staircase, domestic architecture, print culture, Netherlands, Amsterdam

> Today, people build entirely in the French style: they do not mind the façade, they prefer big windows to be able to place expensive curtains and blinds, and where in the previous century a small staircase was made, when they had big rooms,

> they now spoil the small rooms and the whole house to have a beautiful staircase.[1]

This appreciation of Amsterdam houses appeared in 1767 in the journal *De Philosooph* (The Philosopher) in an anonymous, polemic article that describes the general docility in matters of style and the lack of taste in the Netherlands, demonstrated in a critical evaluation of Amsterdam architecture. The author was not much later identified as the internationally renowned doctor Petrus Camper, professor in medicine, anatomist, natural scientist, amateur draughtsman, prolific publicist, and probably the first Dutch architecture critic.[2] Camper, who was more of a virtuoso than an amateur, sketches a development in Amsterdam domestic architecture that is surprisingly accurate in his observation, not only of a strong preference for a French manner in domestic architecture, but especially of the rise of the monumental staircase, or stair hall with open-well stairs that replaced the small wooden newel(-post), or spiral, stair residing in the corner of the front room of the typical seventeenth-century Dutch house.[3] From an indispensable but inconspicuous device, stairs were transformed into a monumental, designed centrepiece of the eighteenth-century house. The increasing presence of the staircase in the homes of the Dutch elite has been noted in scholarship, without

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[1] 'Tegenwoordig bouwt men geheel op den Franschen trant: Men stoort zich weinig aan de Facade, men verkiest groote Raamen, om kostbaare Gordynen en Blinden te kunnen plaatsen, en daar men in de vorige Eeuw een kleine trap maakte, toen men groote Vertrekken hadt, bederft men nu de kleine vertrekken, en het geheele Huis om een fraaijen Trap te hebben', Camper, p. 327.

[2] Bedaux; Schmidt, 'A Passion for Architecture'; Schmidt, *Passion and Control*, pp. 145-153.

[3] Sluyterman; Slothouwer; Houten; Meischke; Zantkuijl, pp. 442-468; Janse; Fock, 'Décor of Domestic Entertaining'; Fock, '1600-1650', p. 22; Koldewij; Pijzel-Domisse, '1700-1750'; Vlaardingerbroek.

however connecting it to the dynamics of fashionable culture of the time that demonstrates a special interest in motion. This contribution considers the new staircase in the broader context of the expansion of the eighteenth-century elite home in the Republic, in which a growing demand for social space coincides with a recurring interest in French (court) culture and fashion, and can be connected to a specific interest in graceful movement of the civilized human body. Ranging from architectural examples to model books and from critical reflections on French manners, cultured behaviour, and style to etiquette manuals and discussions on elegance and physical movement, these sources indicate how the new staircase was part of a larger cultural shift in the configuration and uses of the domestic interior of the elite.

The Open-Well Staircase

Internationally, the monumental, open-well staircase had long been a prominent element in palace architecture, as the main ceremonial route for visitors to arrive at the *piano nobile*, the elevated main floor where the ruler resided in the state apartment.[4] These staircases began to appear in the stately town houses of the elite of courtiers in The Hague and regents in Amsterdam around 1700. In both newly built and renovated houses, large open-well staircases were installed, connecting the main floor to the one above. A void was created above the stairs, crowned by a skylight with a so-called lantern or fenestrated raised cupola in plasterwork.[5] This change, aptly commented on

[4] Huber and Rieth, 46. Staircase is normally used for steps as well as the staircase enclosure, while stairs signifies only the steps. Huber and Rieth, 9.
[5] Goes ; Janse, p. 83.

by Camper, was nothing short of a small cultural revolution in Dutch domestic architecture in the eighteenth century.

The increased interest in the new type of staircase coincides with a renewed international influence from England and France, following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when Stadholder William III became King of England.[6] William and his court circle seem to have stimulated the entrance of the large staircase in the Hague, the political centre of the Republic. France was an important source of inspiration.[7] In the circle of confidants of William, impressive houses appear to be created around majestic staircases. Links with England are obvious, but these staircases also show inspiration from the French nobleman's *hôtel* as it had developed in the seventeenth century and was recorded in Charles-Augustin d'Aviler's *Cours d'architecture* (1691), expanded in every new edition.[8] In the French *hôtels* of Paris and in the architecture of the French royal palaces, the staircase that leads to the main floor was fully developed as a large space within the house. It expressed the taste and elegance of the owner because it could be walked with poise and dignity, rather than be climbed, and function as a backdrop for ceremonial occasions.[9] This aspect of the staircase appeared to many, also in the Republic. Those who wanted to create a similar setting in their homes could find plenty of inspiration in Daniel Marot's work. Marot, the son of the French engraver Jean Marot, had left France as a Huguenot in the 1680s. In his new environment of the

[6] Raay, Spies, and Zoest, *Royal Progress*.
[7] Stenvert and Orsel, pp. 63-64.
[8] Oechslin; Köhler, *Die Stadt Paris*, pp. 183-184; Köhler, '*Architektur ist die Kunst*', pp. 60, 61.
[9] Templer, p. 127.

princely court and Dutch nobility, he would become an all-round designer of French-inspired architecture and design.[10] His work for the court of William III and beyond was influential on both sides of the North Sea, and even broadened after 1702, when William III died.

Marot survived his patron by fifty years, broadening his clientele to the nobility and the wealthy patriciate in the Hague, Amsterdam, and elsewhere. Of the more than 260 prints he published during his lifetime, a series is devoted to his designs for grand staircases with five plates representing grand, open-well staircases for two monumental country seats and two unspecified locations.[11] These resemble the organisation of the Escalier des Ambassadeurs in Louis XIV's Versailles, created in 1679 and destroyed in 1752.[12] The Escalier celebrated the arrival of important visitors, such as the official representatives of foreign heads of state, leading them to the main floor of the palace through a space with an integrated decorative program. The figural and architectural elements emphasized the walls with their *trompe l'oeil* illusion of architectural space.[13] **[PLACE FIGURE 24 HERE]** In Marot's version, on a more modest scale, the Versailles scheme is reduced to a single sequence of flights of stairs and landings (Figure 24).

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[10] Ozinga; Raay, Spies, and Zoest.

[11] *Nouveaux liure de pintures de salles et d'escalliers inventé et gravée par D. Marot Architecte de Guillaume III Roy d'Angleterre, fait avec Privillege des Etats Generaux des Provinces Unies et d'Hollande et West Frise*, undated (c. 1712), (Jessen, no. 115) with *trompe-l'oeil* decorations for several staircases, including the house of the Duke of Albermarle at De Voorst (Jessen pp. 117, 118), the Loo (the royal palace) near Apeldoorn (Jessen, p. 116), and two unspecified locations (Jessen pp. 119, 120). For d'Aviler in the Dutch context, see Zoest and Van Eck, *Huis Schuylenburch* ; Zoest and Van Eck, '"Zeer voorname woonhuizen"'.

[12] Réau, p. 52; Ozinga, p. 63.

[13] Yerkes, pp. 81-82.

Almost the entire space is painted in *trompe l'oeil*, with large planes between the painted architectural elements on the level of the upper floor breaking the wall surface. The painted walls create the illusion of openness of the structure on all sides, with exotic figures against a landscape background observing the user of the staircase, thus creating a spectacle that stimulated motion and prepared the visitor to meet his host. Rather than a showpiece of architectural ingenuity, the staircase presents a stage in which the stair climber is the main actor and takes centre stage. **[PLACE FIGURE 25 HERE]** Another engraving by Marot shows façades and plans of the main floors of three Amsterdam houses of single and double width, with stoops in front, presenting attempts to incorporate considerable staircases into the houses (Figure 25).[14] In the two three-bay houses, the standard width of a canal house, the staircases are located next to the inner court or enclosed by rooms, requiring a skylight, with the right one showing a rhythmically segmented, symmetrically decorated hallway that leads past the large staircase before arriving at the great bedchamber overlooking the garden.

Theatrum Machinarum Universale

In the 1730s, the inclusion of a monumental staircase had become almost obligatory for any large building. A unique publication of around this time highlights the staircase both as a work of craftsmanship and as a piece of architecture, a combination of art and ingenuity. **[PLACE FIGURE 26 HERE]** Tieleman van der Horst's *Theatrum machinarum universale; of nieuwe algemeene Bouw-kunde* (1739), published by Petrus Schenk with

[14] *Nouveau livre de batiments de differentes penseez.* Jessen, no. 12; Ozinga, p. 132; Zoest and Van Eck, '"Zeer voorname woonhuizen"'; Pijzel-Domisse, '1700-1750', p. 184.

thirty magnificent and detailed plates by Jan Schenk, is completely devoted to the art of the staircase (Figure 26).[15] This original Dutch publication holds a special place among eighteenth-century literature on engineering. The construction of stairs was traditionally entrusted to a variety of craftsmen in the timber trades, including house carpenters, with specialized stair builders sometimes working together with sculptors and specialized craftsmen to create ornamental details.[16] Van der Horst rightly claims that there is hardly any literature about the making of stairs. The engravings are very precise and show stairs of varying complexity, to which are added five prints of lanterns to crown staircases. Although it seems possible, as Van der Horst suggests in his foreword, that this publication was specifically aimed at carpenters, or at least written in a clear and concise way so that carpenters would understand, it should also, because of its special presentation, please the 'lovers of architecture and drawing'.[17] Indeed, a publication of this format with such high-quality engravings was probably only affordable for successful craftsmen, architects, and building entrepreneurs. They could find there solutions to creating a beautiful stair in the most irregular spaces, but the high quality of the printwork also indicates a certain attraction for an audience of collectors and, possibly, homeowners with plans to renovate their homes with a tailor-made, built-in, fashionable staircase. In that sense, the publication functioned as a model book in a consumer-driven market. The thirty plates show various stairs with concave and convex steps and winders, 'quartier-bomen' (outer strings) and how to

[15] Scheele; Mielke; Vijver, pp. 62-63.
[16] Bollerey.
[17] 'liefhebbers der bouw- en teken-konst', Horst, 'Voor-reden'.

draw and calculate these, followed by spiral stairs with newels and with concave and convex steps in various ways. A small, separate, accompanying booklet without separate title and date provides van der Horst's precise descriptions of all the parts and how to put them together, written in such a way 'as if I am explaining it to someone verbally'.[18] In the booklet, any reference to the use or the location of staircases is missing, as are any hints at the staircase's application or the various gradations of ornamental detailing. No mention is made of how these stairs opened up new possibilities for decoration and design or made full use of the moving viewer. Yet, the different types of stairs and their many variations in curves, details of the woodwork, and decoration seem to indicate that all of these types would be part of the repertoire that was available and in demand around the time of publication.

The accuracy that should be observed in all elements of the staircase in the interiors of Dutch buildings is reflected in the precision of word and image and draws our attention to the machine-like construction of the staircase that was suggested by the title of the book and the series it belonged to. Published under the series title of *Theatrum machinarum universale, of nieuwe algemeene bouwkunde* (Universal Theatre of Machines, or New General Architecture), this book of stairs was placed next to the volumes on windmills and waterworks (sluices and bridges), which were published by Petrus Schenk and available in German and French. The choice to publish the staircase in relation to machines that used wind energy and hydraulics crucial to the industry and

[18] 'ik moet byna op deſelve manier ſchryven, alsof ik het mondeling aan iemandt be duyde', Ibid.

economics of the Republic suggests that staircases were considered an important feat of Dutch engineering and design in the eyes of Schenk and van der Horst and not an occasional publication. In other words, as suggested also by Camper in 1767, the Dutch design of the staircase was something that may have been inspired by examples from England, France, and other nations, but it was definitely considered an original contribution to international architecture, worthy of being acknowledged and distributed widely by the makers of the book. This piece of machinery acquired a central role in the transformation of Dutch architecture and established itself in domestic architecture.

Social Space

The entry of the staircase into the houses of the elite, more often by extensive renovations rather than newly built homes, adds to the representational part of the interior a large space devoted to motion. Created to facilitate a growing demand for diversification and extension of spaces for social gatherings and entertainment, the new staircase was a monumental and fashionable commodity that shifted the boundary between public and private areas, pushing it further back. Thus, it increased the part of the domestic sphere that was, to a certain extent and for a limited group of guests, put on display. That the staircase became such an important element in this gradual transformation of domestic space is intimately linked to the character of sociability among this elite and the way these regents structured their daily life during these decades. This ‘new interiority’, of which the staircase was the most prominent element,

developed in a context in which aristocratisation among the regent elite and the activities deployed to maintain their status and position were driven by their 'social capital'. Imitations of aspects of a noble lifestyle by the regent families were generally not combined with a desire to actually achieve noble status, but rather to distinguish themselves from the burghers, the well-to-do bourgeoisie and the new rich.[19] To maintain their position as wealthy families, friendship, or financial, political, and socio-cultural abilities were deployed strategically.[20] The maintenance of a network of relations with family and friends was organized through upbringing, education, marriage politics, public relations, and the use of tradition, customs, and conventions that cemented the group. [21] In the daily life of the regents, visits to friends and kin were crucial to maintaining and reinforcing these social ties, especially in the larger cities.[22] So-called *jours* and *sociétés* regulated daily life of the elite, where paying visits and counter-visits to each other was common practice, and men escorted women daily to operas, concerts, and parties.[23] The interiors of these houses were the most frequented spaces and qualified as important elements in the socio-cultural strategy of entertainment, friendship, and, as a consequence, the specific culture of distinction with accompanying codes. The interior thus became an important instrument of self-fashioning of the regent elite: paying visits and inviting guests at home functioned as a

[19] Kooijmans, 'Patriciaat en aristocratisering', pp. 99-100.
[20] Schmidt, *Om de eer*, pp. 193-194 prefers to use the Dutch 'societal ability', cultural ability or 'civility' (*beschaving*), instead of the English translation of Bourdieu's 'social capital' and 'cultural capital', with their materialist assocations.
[21] Ibid., p. 10.
[22] Kloek and Mijnhardt, p. 100; Zandvliet, p. 275.
[23] Wolzogen Kühr, pp. 45-47, 134-135, 137-138.

means to enact identity and emphasize rank, status, and class through interior space.[24] In the first half of the eighteenth century, the extended interior created more social space to act out and display an idealized self, providing a continuum for the shaping of identity, personal and in terms of pedigree and close allies.

The new, large staircase provided an appropriate element for the culture of distinction and extended the interior needed for friendship, meetings with relatives, and the reception of special guests. After entering the house via the stoop outside, guests would move into the vestibule of the hall and would gain access to the antechamber, or the room *en suite*. From there, they could be invited further into the house, pass the staircase to the large salon overlooking the garden or climb the new stairs in their cage, lit by the lantern above the void. The stairs lead exclusively to the floor above and could give access to further cabinets or spaces accompanied by the host, to have intimate conversation or inspect the private collections of art, books, prints, et cetera.

Amsterdam

Around the middle of the century, the monumental staircase was assimilated and had spread across the Republic, and, throughout the 1750s and 1760s, would be introduced to many new, existing, and renovated houses and residential and administration buildings.[25] In the largest city of the Republic, Amsterdam, open-well staircases were integrated in large-scale extensions and renovations of the houses along the fashionable

[24] Baxter and Martin, p. 3.
[25] For instance, in the work of the architect Pieter de Swart in The Hague, Den Bosch, Velsen, and Leeuwarden. See Schmidt, *Pieter de Swart*.

canals, the Herengracht and Keizersgracht. Originally built in the seventeenth century, many of these houses were transformed in building campaigns that took years to complete. As the Amsterdam examples of Marot already showed, these campaigns often included the creation of a new façade with a heightened cornice and new fenestration, the addition of a back-aisle or second volume with multiple floors, and a general rearrangement and distribution of representative rooms. A new configuration of renovated and added rooms and spaces with varying functions is put together, maximizing interconnections that stimulate motion. Interestingly, in the Amsterdam houses with their main floors, the so-called *bel-étage*, raised above street level to accommodate a low semi-subterranean service level, the new staircase, instead of leading to the principal floor, begins there and moves to the upper floor, access to which was originally restricted and served by a spiral stair.

[PLACE FIGURE 27 HERE] A series of sections of extended canal houses dating from the mid-eighteenth century have been preserved in the Amsterdam Municipal Archive (Figure 27). Probably produced for education purposes, they show four alternatives of the size and distribution of the extended homes with luxurious interiors that some of the most wealthy individuals and families based in Amsterdam were striving for. All four sections are taken through the main rooms and therefore do not show the vestibule and connecting hallway that runs through the typical mid-eighteenth-century canal house on the main floor and the one above.[26] The garden level

[26] See, for instance, Herengracht 284, or Rutgers's house, today known as Huis van Brienen. Meischke; Swigchem; Schmidt, *Passion and Control*, pp. 17-24.

is reached via the stairs that lead to a garden room on one side, and the kitchen on the other. On the right is the canal entrance with the high stoop that gives access to the main floor. The front room could be attached to a room *en suite*, with a set of wide sliding doors, originally called *porte-brisée* relating to its French inspiration, making it possible to create one extended, flexible space for special occasions.[27] The large staircase finds its place beyond the room *en suite* and was thus constructed at the back of the original seventeenth-century house. Via an inner court, the hallway passes another room before reaching the monumental staircase in its cage, crowned by a sky-lit lantern and decorated with stucco. The hallway then ends in the high main salon overlooking the garden, used for social gatherings and parties. The open stairs with a curved newel connect the main floor with the one above, but also provide an extra flight to reach the floor above the salon. This example shows how Amsterdam canal houses often more than doubled in volume when renovated, to create connecting rooms for commodity, company, and sociability, and thus stimulate movement in the house. The gradual increase of spaces that were transformed to be accessible and the disappearance of bedchambers to more private quarters in Amsterdam domestic architecture is also reflected in contemporary dollhouses with new interiors crafted around the staircase and the new order it made possible.[28] From a narrow spiral, stairs

[27] Fock, 'Décor of Domestic Entertaining', pp. 109-114.
[28] Pijzel-Domisse, *Het Hollandse pronkpoppenhuis*; Moseley-Christian, p. 349; Schmidt, *Passion and Control*, pp. 24-26; Varat.

had become a fashionable and luxurious commodity, blurring the boundaries between perceptions of public and private and increasing domesticity.

The increase in rooms and social spaces made possible by large scale renovation and the inclusion of a monumental staircase between the *bel-etage* and the upper floor suggests that guests were invited deeper into the home to appreciate the extended and spatially varied interiors. It appears that the strict division between social and private floors was changing with the rise of the staircase. The variety in open-well staircases increased, suggesting that these became important features to embellish the house, even though access could remain restricted.

In 1733, the newlywed couple Petronella and Mattheus de Neufville started the great transformation of their house at Herengracht 475.[29] The portal, hallways, and the great staircase are covered with stuccowork and sculptures by Jan van Logteren, dating from 1736, forming an impressive representational ensemble to welcome the visitor. **[PLACE FIGURE 28 HERE]** The open-well staircase, ranging from the *bel-étage* to the specially constructed lantern and decorated with a group of musicians above the second-floor level, forms the centrepiece of the whole composition (Figure 28). The walls above the console-supported entablature represent a musicians' gallery with balconies on four sides of the domed lantern containing sixteen musicians playing different instruments underneath the domed space with its fenestrated lantern. The theatrical setting suggests an extraordinary passion for music of the owners of

[29] Schmidt, *Passion and Control*, pp. 28-37.

Herengracht 475. Indeed, there is evidence that in Amsterdam at the time, a rich musical climate existed, with plenty of opportunities for musical performances for the cosmopolitan elite.[30] To what extent these musical performances involved motion and dance, or if these were more of the recital type, is not entirely clear. On the other hand, musical performances with the playing of instruments and singing were part of the social life in elite circles. This staircase refers to the program of the court state staircase, reduced to the proportions of the Amsterdam canal house. The link with the painted staircases designed by Marot for Dutch palaces, with their observers leaning over to see who is moving up, is inescapable. The reference to music may allude to dance, as a particular activity associated with cultural refinement, court culture, and aristocratic behaviour, but was also understood at the time as part of French cultural influence related to elite leisure. The 'minstrel gallery' brings forward the idea of a theatre and stage, with mute musicians inviting the walker to dance, or at least to walk the stairs elegantly and with verve.

[PLACE FIGURE 29 HERE] A special series of drawings for the renovation of a specific house draws attention to the prominence that came to be attached to the staircase. Keizersgracht 224 (House Saxenburg), originally built shortly before 1625, came into the hands of the extremely wealthy couple Dirk Roest van Alkemade and Geertruid Maria Dutry in 1745.[31] The dates of transformations of the house are not

[30] Rasch, p. 189; Ibid., p. 37.
[31] Eeghen; Tulleners, pp. 73-75; Meischke, et al., pp. 77, 79, 83; Zandvliet, pp. 270-271. The drawings, attributed to Nicolaas Bruijnestein, were discovered in 1956 and acquired by Amsterdam City Archives. Only one of the drawings bears Nicolaas Bruijnestein's signature, and

recorded, but the ornamental details of the drawings suggest that the large interior transformation and extension date from the 1750s. Some drawings seem related to a renovation of the main hall and staircase and show the main transitory spaces that were given form to connect the main rooms to each other and articulate motion by a subtle play with planes, profiles, levels, and turns. The drawing included here shows the length of the hallway that opens to the stairs (Figure 29). The hallway is divided into various bays with distinct profiles, meant to be executed in stuccowork that invite and accompany the visitor's movement and express architectural order and rhythm.

The new Amsterdam staircases, some more directly inspired by French examples and others following earlier examples in town or from somewhere else that had come to the attention of the owner or newly designed, show a desire to rearrange the interior of the residence that points towards a different use of the home and shifting the boundaries between the strictly private rooms on the upper floors and those accessible for family, relatives, and other guests. In the daily life of the regent elite, the extended range of rooms increased the necessity to move around appropriately. How this should be achieved could be learned from instruction manuals describing aspects of court culture and ceremony.

Natural Grace and Posture of the Body

The Dutch word *zwier* around this time is specifically used in the sense of graciousness and elegance in motion and connected to dance, and it was associated in particular in

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not all drawings can be linked to one building campaign. On Bruijnestein, see Quarles van Ufford, pp. 25-27; Baarsen, pp. 20, 91-93; Koldewij, p. 288.

contemporary texts with the latest fashionable French manners, style, and courtly behaviour.[32] In manuals on appropriate behaviour, such as *De Hollandsche zedemeester* (The Dutch Moralist), teaching concentrated on how to behave as an honest man or woman, to move in the world with honour and lustre. There, elegance was particularly useful and recommended as appropriate in the duties by those of the court, 'the princes and great of the world'.[33] It requires a certain manner of behaviour, conduct, and movement geared to the surrounding décor and those present or having access to it. Dancing was considered an integral part of this behaviour in *De hoofsche wellevendheid en loffelyke welgemaniertheid* (1733), a book on appropriate courtly behaviour and mannerliness, as were horseback riding, singing, and making music. It is important that one should not only be aware of how to dance, but even more of 'the rules of dancing, and of the decency (*betamelijkheid*), which should be observed in relation to the place, where one is'.[34]

To Carel van Laar, dance is the art of mannered and gracious movement associated with civility, promoted as an important part of elite education, together with horse riding and fencing. It is needed to arrive at a 'natural graciousness in movement and posture of the body' (*natuurlyke zwier en houding des ligchaams*) and is as important for propriety as are dress and the manner of speaking.[35] Van Laar's *Het groot ceremonie-boek der beschaafde zeden* (1735) (The Grand Ceremony Book of Civilized

[32] Laar, pp. 18, 68-70, 96, 168, 171, 189. See also *De Nederlandsche Spectator*, no. 45 (1750), pp. 124, 150-151; no. 49 (1750), p. 179.
[33] 'de grooten', *De Hollandsche zedemeester*, pp. 102, 184.
[34] *De hoofsche wellevendheid*, p. 113.
[35] Laar, p. 171; Roodenburg, *Eloquence of the Body*, pp. 83-92.

Manners) translated French etiquette into a Dutch manual of good manners and civilized behaviour. It forms an interesting source to investigate movement further, in relation to gestural communication. Like other books on manners, translations of Castiglione's *Il cortegiano*, Faret's *Honnête homme*, and De Courtin's *Nouveau traité de la civilité*, it fell on fertile ground in the elite circles in the Republic.[36] Twelve conversations, among the experienced Johan, two young adults from the nobility, Carel and Maria, and Christina, a senior lady-in-waiting, address different aspects of politeness.[37] Van Laar specifically identifies a Dutch gestural culture, an art of non-verbal communication, and addresses a number of specific situations for which appropriate comportment mattered. For instance, he provides rules on how, when, and where to move when being received in audience by a prince, but also deals with the ceremonial of hosts and guests of lesser rank, paying a visit to someone of high rank, as 'it is always best to extend the ceremonial in such a way, as is in accordance with propriety'.[38]

This kind of behaviour, with a strong influence of French (court) culture, had become custom, although it was still criticized as well, for instance in Justus van Effen's *Hollandsche Spectator.* From 1731 to 1735, Van Effen published the *Hollandsche Spectator* in 240 issues, making this genre of publication popular in the Republic. His main inspiration were the English examples of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* of Steele

[36] On van Laar, see Roodenburg, ' "Hand of Friendship"', p. 156; Hietbrink.
[37] Hietbrink, p. 205.
[38] 'dog is het altoos best, het ceremonieel zo verre, uittestrekken, als zulks maar enigszints met de welvoegendheid bestaan kan', Laar, p. 257.

and Addison.[39] Issue 197 presents a fictitious letter of a young lady, Apollonia. Her parents had raised her 'in all the appropriate crafts, in the French language, singing and dancing'.[40] She complained, however, that her ability to dance 'with the most pleasant elegance', or *zwier* in Dutch, was often appreciated in company, but her skills also elicited critical remarks about her behaviour as being arrogant or even promiscuous. 'The fear that this slander might be just, makes that I often suspect and accuse myself of weaknesses and defects that I am probably not suffering from, and suggests that everything I do or say in company turns into obstructed constraint and bereaves it of all natural grace.' [41] The fictitious correspondence, continued in another letter by the 'Spectator' himself, makes clear how this behaviour of female members of the elite, with song, dance, and a French twist, was greeted with hesitation and as a blurring of the Dutch character and language, but nonetheless manifested itself clearly in fashionable social culture of the time.[42]

In another issue of van Effen's *Hollandsche Spectator*, this fashion was also described as invading interior space, in the rooms of a *société galante* described in a letter to the *Hollandsche Specator*, again fictitious, of Gunomime, secretary of the

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[39] Groenenboom-Draai, introduction to *De Hollandsche Spectator. Aflevering 31-60*, pp. 10, 13-14, 18.

[40] Effen, *De Hollandsche Spectator. Aflevering 196-240*, no. 197 (14 September 1733), p. 53.

[41] 'De vreeze dat deze agterklap wel eenigzins gegrond mogt wezen, maakt dat ik my dikmaals verdenk en zelfs beschuldige van zwakheden, en gebreeken waar aan ik mogelyk niet eens onderhevig ben, en zulks geeft aan al wat ik in gezelschap doe of zeg eene belemmerde gedwongenheid, die 't zelve van alle natuurlyke bevalligheid noodzaaklyk moet beroven', Effen, *De Hollandsche Spectator. Aflevering 196-240*, no. 197 (14 September 1733), p. 54.

[42] Ibid, pp. 56-57.

society of 'twelve young gentlemen of the utmost decency, or at least the utmost of wealth' under the French motto *La Mode est le grand art de plaire* (Fashion is the great art of pleasing)'.[43] The whole interior is cramped 'with exquisite English and French furniture of the latest invention' and nothing in the interior is allowed to offend 'the current orthodoxy of fashion'.[44] Two full-size mirrors and a walnut dressing table – with pomade, countless combs, and powder compacts with brushes and bellows 'of a new design, still unknown to most ladies of the big world' – serve to maintain the members' clothing, stance, and graciousness or elegance that today's 'gallant man' cannot do without.[45] These men modelled their appearance and conduct on foreign court culture: 'Most of us have spent some time at the courts of France and Great Britain, and after having observed the manners of both peoples at length, have invented a middle way between the French *Petits-maitres*, and the English *Beaux*, as corresponding best to our national character (*landaard*), and have transferred it in our behaviour and manners'.[46] Here, we find a reference to the French *galanterie*, the apex of cultural refinement and taste, which can be linked to *zwier. Galanterie* in France stood for intentional ambiguity, for the dichotomy of display and retreat, of formal and informal, of static and moving, of

[43] 'twaalf jonge Heeren van 't eerste fatsoen, of ten minste van de eerste rykdom', Effen, *De Hollandsche Spectator. Aflevering 196-240*, no. 224 (18 December 1733), pp. 258-264, esp. 260.
[44] 'met Fransche en Engelsche meubilen van de aldernieuwste inventien', 'de thans in zwang gaande rechtzinnigheid der mode', Ibid., p. 261.
[45] van een nieuwe vinding, en aan de meeste Dames van de groote waereld zelfs nog onbekend', Ibid., p. 261.
[46] 'Wy hebben meest allen eenigen tyd aan de hoven van Vrankryk en Groot Brittanje versleeten, en na de manieren der twee volken rypelyk te hebben overwogen, hebben wy een middelslag uitgevonden tusschen de Fransche *Petits-maitres*, en de Engelsche *Beaux*, en 't zelve hebben wy, als het meest met onzen landaard overeenkomstig, in ons gedrag en zeden overgebragt', Ibid., p. 261.

noble and bourgeois. [47] Together with other aspects of French culture, *galanterie* found its place in the new sociability of the Dutch elite.

Motion and Intellectual Faculties

In van Effen's *Hollandsche Spectator*, 'there is no doubt that dancing to the sound of lively music is on most occasions one of the healthiest exercises of the body'.[48] He devoted an essay to an unspecified text by a recent French author about 'the relationship between motion and intellectual faculties' (*eene comparatie tusschen de* Gang der menschen *en derzelver* verstand en geest).[49] 'Dancing is, in fact, nothing else than an elegant tread ruled by art. Someone who wants to dance seems obliged to give all possible grace to his movements, and to his whole posture, and he aims to follow the rules of that art, to excel and shine in force and speed'.[50] There is a relationship with the intellectual faculties of the writer, who wants to show all his spirit, fire, and finesse of imaginative power, without wanting to hide the attempts to achieve it. Sharing a book or piece of writing with an audience is to commit openly, to apply all talents to a subject that one is capable of gathering from nature and art. 'The more the artful attempts in the dance of the intellect and of the body appear natural, the more they do credit to its

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[47] On *galanterie*, see Viala; Meglin, p. 235.
[48] 'Men twyfele ook niet, of het danssen op het geluit van een levendig musyk is in veele gelegendheden een van de gezondste lighaamsoefeningen, die met een goed gevolg kunnen worden in het werk gesteld', Effen, no. 321 (1734), quoted in Wolzogen Kühr, p. 135.
[49] Effen, *De Hollandsche Spectator. Aflevering 106-150*, no. 129 (19 January 1733), p. 198.
[50] 'Het danssen is eigentlyk niet anders als eene zwierige en door de kunst geregelde gang. Iemand die aan het dansen wil gaan, schynt zig als te verpligten om alle mogelyke bevalligheid aan zyne bewegingen, en aan zyne gansche gestalte te geven, en hy wil wel weten dat hy de regels van de kunst poogt te volgen, om zyn kragt en gezwintheid het meest te doen gelden en uitblinken', Ibid., *De Hollandsche Spectator. Aflevering 106-150*, no. 129 (19 January 1733), p. 201.

user and enhance the appreciation for his innate gift and aptitude'.[51] In a later essay, van Effen expanded his discussion of the relationship to conversation, comparing it to physical contradance (*lighaamlyke contredans*). Male and female dancers could balance their partnership, while women could find in dance another way to free their body and mind.[52] These were activities in which women could express themselves as equals of men. Where the bodily contradance is cheerful, lively, somewhat wild and rude, and provides the dance with the most pleasant gracefulness (*bevalligheid*), the contradance of the mind does the same for conversation 'and in every way of expressing oneself, which can be understood as the special movements and paces of these dances'.[53] Conversation, writing, and dancing are thus parallel arts. One could compare lovers of dancing, who understand the basics and distinguish themselves through talent without being dancers by profession, to lovers of conversation and writing. When lovers of dance practice this art at times, their aim is practice and entertainment rather than

[51]'Egter is het waar zo in de *dans van de geestrykheid* als in die van het lighaam, dat hoe meer de konstige pogingen om zig bevallig te maken naar de natuurlykheid zwemen, hoe meer ze den genen, die 'er zo een gelukkig gebruik van maakt, vereeren, en hoe voordeliger gedagten ze doen hebben van zyne aangeboren gaven en geschiktheden', Ibid., *De Hollandsche Spectator. Aflevering 106-150*, no. 129 (19 January 1733), p. 201.

[52] Matluck Brooks, p. 11.

[53] 'In eene *lighaamlyke contredans* is alles vroolyk, levendig, en eenigzins wild en woest, en die woestheid, die ten hoogste in een geregelde dans misstaan zou, geeft aan deze de aangenaamste bevalligheid. ... De *Contredans van 't verstand*, eene levendige en geestige conversatie, is van dezelve natuur, en aan dezelfde wetten onderworpen, eene ongedwonge vrolykheid is 'er als de ziel van, ze vereischt geene vieze gepastheid in ieder gedachten, en in ieder wyze van zig uit te drukken, die als de byzondere beweegingen en passen van diergelyk danssen moeten aangemerkt worden', Effen, *De Hollandsche Spectator. Aflevering 106-150*, no. 138 (20 February 1733), p. 252.

profit or glory, not unlike a reasonable man who compiles and publishes his works to cultivate and embellish the natural force of his mind.[54]

These kinds of general rules seem to have resonated with the owners of houses who were looking for references to courtly ceremonial and rules of politeness and refinement to be applied at home and during visits to show and display, consolidate friendships, and reinforce social ties. It seems that in these houses, the positive and fashionable French *galanterie*, for which the internal space of the house is extended, in fact leads to a complete reconfiguration of the social spaces of the home. *Galanterie*, as intentional ambiguity, could be acted out through motion in the new, interconnected spaces as a social spectacle.

Eloquence and appropriate posture were combined in coordinated movement through the spaces of the eighteenth-century Amsterdam house in the canal district. While the salon or the suite of rooms with a similar arrangement could be the backdrop for the meetings in which cultured behaviour, *honnêteté*, *politesse* or civility, was crucial, the staircase could play an equally important and distinct part in illustrating the owner's status. Wider stairs and landings offered more freedom of motion, the possibility of repose and looking around. A visit to relatives or friends could thus

[54] 'Daar zyn liefhebbers van het danssen, die de kunst in de grond verstaan, en die zig, door dat aangenaam talent, voordeelig van anderen onderscheiden, zonder danssers by *professie* te zyn. Wanneer zy zig nu en dan van die kunst bedienen, is hun oogmerk eer oefening en vermaak als winst en glory. In een diergelyk dansser kan men zonder moeite vinden 't afbeeldzel van een reedelyk man die eenige werken t'zamen steld en in 't ligt geeft, niet zo zeer uit een beweegreden van eer- en baatzugt, als wel om zig zelve te voldoen en om door de oeffening de natuurlyke kragt van zyn geest aan te kweeken, en te versieren', Ibid., p. 253.

become a combination of conversation and perfectly performed motion to allude to one's intellectual capacities. By moving through the spacious staircase, new vistas were offered from different angles and in different lights. Painted or sculpted decorations emphasize the dynamics of motion and tempt progressing along the steps while being accompanied and observed. Nothing obstructs the user from entering, moving up, and taking centre stage in this new open structure. A specific decorative program could enhance the spectacle. In Amsterdam, the most convincing example is probably the 'minstrel gallery' above the grand stairs of Herengracht 475 (Figure 28). The stucco decoration provides essential performative qualities and makes the staircase function as the *pièce de resistance* of the eighteenth-century transformation of the fashionable Amsterdam canal house, giving plenty of opportunity to make daily routine into a social performance of almost aristocratic distinction.

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De hoofsche wellevendheid, en loffelyke welgemaniertheid, by alle vootreffelyke luiden in Nederland gebruykelyk, leerende hoe men in alle voorvallende gelegentheden en ontmoetingen, zig wysselyk en lieftalig zal aanstellen en bestieren [...] Hier is agter bygevoegt een brief hoe men zig ten hove moet dragen, door Erasmus van Rotterdam. Amsterdam: Jacob Graal, 1733.

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